

Message Text

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PAGE 01 SEOUL 02045 140355Z
ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 H-01 /014 W
-----096079 140400Z /64
P 140330Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9828

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: MASS, KS, SOCI
SUBJ: KOREAN CRIME

REF: STATE 61201

SUMMARY: GENERAL CRIME RATE IN ROK IS LOW, NOTABLY IN THE
CATEGORY OF CRIMES WITH ACCOMPANYING VIOLENCE. MANY FACTORS
INCLUDING KOREAN SOCIETAL NATURE ITSELF, TEND TO INHIBIT
CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR.

1. STATISTICS RELEASED BY THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE SHOW
FOR THE FIRST TIME IN RECENT YEARS A DECREASE (4.2 PERCENT)
IN AN ALREADY LOW CRIME RATE. JUSTICE OFFICIALS ATTRIBUTE
THE DECREASE PRIMARILY TO ECONOMIC GROWTH AND SOCIAL
STABILITY, WHILE OTHER COMMENTATORS HAVE ADDED AS A
CONTRIBUTING FACTOR "AN IMPROVEMENT IN THE PEOPLE'S
MORALITY" DERIVING FROM INCREASED PUBLIC EDUCATION.

2. 1977 STATISTICS: (SEE NOTES)

TOTAL CRIMINAL OFFENDERS: 708,599 (1976: APPROX 740,000)
"VIOLENCE" (A): 193,323
TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS (B): 142,058
THEFT (C): 69,144
ARMY RESERVE VIOLATIONS (D): 55,708
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FRAUD (E): 41,627
"OTHER CRIMES": 206,739

(A) A CRIME OF "VIOLENCE" IS A VERY BROAD AND
ENCOMPASSING STATUTE IN KOREA, INCLUDING SUCH ACTS
AS FISTFIGHTS. VIOLENT CRIME, PARTICULARLY USING DEADLY
WEAPONS, IS NOT WIDESPREAD IN KOREA. PRIVATE POSSESSION

OF HANDGUNS IS PROHIBITED AND THE LAW IS STRICTLY ENFORCED.

(B) KOREAN LAW DOES NOT MAKE A CLEAR DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN MISDEMEANOR AND FELONY. THE GREAT MAJORITY OF TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS WOULD NOT EVEN BE CLASSIFIED AS MISDEMEANORS BY AMERICAN LEGAL STANDARDS.

(C) MOST THEFTS IN KOREA ARE SURREPTITIOUS. THE GENERAL SOCIAL PROHIBITION AGAINST USE OF DEADLY WEAPONS AND THE ABSENCE OF PRIVATE GUNS MAKE RARE OFFENSES SUCH AS ARMED ROBBERY OR MUGGING.

(D) IN KOREA IT IS CLASSIFIED A "CRIME" TO MISS MILITARY RESERVE MEETINGS. INCIDENCE OF THIS "CRIME" IS CONSIDERABLY HIGHER THAN THOSE CASES WHICH ARE REPORTED. THIS OFFENSE, OF COURSE, WOULD NOT APPEAR IN AMERICAN CRIME STATISTICS.

(E) FRAUD. AGAIN, A CLASS OF BROAD STATUTES, WHICH INCLUDES MANY OFFENSES CLASSIFIED AS MISDEMEANORS BY AMERICAN LAW.

3. COMMENTS: THE STATISTICS SHOW A SIGNIFICANT (24 PERCENT) DECREASE IN THEFT AND FRAUD CASES FOR 1977, PARTICULARLY WHEN COMPARED WITH THE ANNUAL 7.3 PERCENT AVERAGE INCREASE IN THESE CRIMES REPORTED UNTIL 1976. SINCE THEFT AND FRAUD ARE THOSE CRIMES MOST DIRECTLY RELATED TO ECONOMIC FACTORS, THESE STATISTICS SEEM TO SUPPORT THE CLAIM THAT INCREASED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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STANDARDS OF LIVING HAVE HELPED REDUCE THE CRIME RATE.

4. THE PRIMARY REASON FOR KOREA'S LOW CRIME RATE IS MOST LIKELY ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE NATURE OF THE SOCIETY ITSELF, IN WHICH SOCIETAL PRESSURES LIMIT AND CONSTRAIN INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOR. IN KOREAN SOCIETY, THE CONSEQUENCES OF ONE'S ACTIONS DO NOT SIMPLY REFLECT UPON THE INDIVIDUAL, BUT ALSO UPON ONE'S FAMILY (OR ONE'S SCHOOL, THE COUNTRY, ETC.). THE FEELING OF RESPONSIBILITY TO THE GROUP THUS ACTS TO CURB ABHERENT AND ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOR. OTHER FACTORS CITED FOR THE LOW CRIME RATE IN KOREA INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

(A) A STRICTLY ENFORCED NIGHTLY CURFEW IS IN EFFECT FROM 12:00 PM TO 4:00 AM, AND THE OPPORTUNITY FOR CRIMINAL ACTS IS EXTREMELY LIMITED.

(B) STRONG LAWS AND STRICT ENFORCEMENT HAVE MADE ILLICIT DRUG USE SMALL IN KOREA. THUS, KOREA SUFFERS VERY LITTLE DRUG-RELATED CRIME (A SIGNIFICANT PERCENTAGE OF AMERICAN BIG-CITY CRIME).

(C) THE SMALL PERCENTAGE OF PRIVATELY-OWNED AUTOMOBILES
LIMITS CRIMINAL MOBILITY, AS WELL AS CAR-RELATED LARCENIES
AND AUTO-THEFT.

(D) ROK, THE SIZE OF INDIANA WITH A POPULATION OF ABOUT
36 MILLION, IS AMONG THE THREE MOST DENSELY POPULATED
COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD. ALL CITIZENS MUST CARRY NATIONAL
IDENTITY CARDS, AND THEIR PLACE OF RESIDENCE IS A MATTER
OF PUBLIC RECORD. THE EXISTENCE OF A NATIONAL POLICE FORCE
REDUCES JURISDICTIONAL PROBLEMS IN CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS.
THIS NATIONAL POLICE FORCE IS A LARGE AND POWERFUL BODY
WHICH OPERATES WITH CONSIDERABLY MORE LATITUDE THAN AMERICAN
LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES. IN SUM, KOREA IS A DIFFICULT PLACE
FOR A CRIMINAL TO HIDE FOR LONG.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CRIMES, DATA
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 14 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978SEOUL02045
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780112-0512
Format: TEL
From: SEOUL
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780371/aaaachrr.tel
Line Count: 137
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: cbdef5c7-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 STATE 61201
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: N/A
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3339324
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: KOREAN CRIME
TAGS: MASS, SOCI, KS
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/cbdef5c7-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014